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AUTHOR Hendrix, Katherine Grace
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ABSTRACT

Qualitative case study is used to explore the conceptualization of "teacher credibility" and to examine the effect of race upon perceptions of credibility. Non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaires reflect methods used to collect data from two social science professors and their students. Both professor participants are male, of similar age, and possess comparable teaching experience at the collegiate level. However, they are of different races, one is Black, the other white. Data from four of their students represent the students' perspectives on professor credibility as a white and Black male enrolled in a social science course taught by a white male professor and a white and Black male enrolled in a related course taught by a Black male. Six phenomena of particular interest emerge during data analysis: (1) the existence of group and institutional credibility; (2) the temporal nature of credibility; (3) the presence of camaraderie and personal relationships among departmental faculty; (4) shared student and professor identity and the need for biculturalism on the part of Black professors; (5) the continued presence of "self" teacher concerns for the Black professor; and (6) the potential of researcher race influencing the study results. (Fifty-two references and a professor credibility survey instrument are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Guess Who's Coming to Lecture?: Two Case Studies in Professor Credibility

Katherine Grace Hendrix
University of Washington
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Abstract

This paper notes credibility research in the speech communication discipline has been strongly criticized for its quantitative focus. The quantitative focus overemphasizes measurement of the credibility construct and underemphasizes theoretical explication of the construct. Qualitative case study is used to explore the conceptualization of "teacher credibility" and to examine race and perceptions of credibility. Non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaires reflect methods used to collect data from two social science professors and their students.

Both professor participants are male, of similar age, and possess comparable years of teaching experience at the collegiate level. However, they are of different races - one professor is Black (Professor R) and the other white (Professor E). Data from four of their students represent the students' perspectives on professor credibility as a white and Black male enrolled in a social science course taught by a white male professor and a white and Black male enrolled in a related course taught by a Black male.

Six phenomena of particular interest emerge during data analysis. The six phenomena noted and discussed in the paper are as follows: 1) the existence of group and institutional credibility, 2) the temporal nature of credibility, 3) the presence of comraderie and personal relationships among departmental faculty, 4) shared student and professor identity and the need for biculturalism on the part of Black professors, 5) the continued presence of "self" teacher concerns for Professor R, and 6) the potential of researcher race influencing the study results.

Within the discipline of speech communication there is a long history of investigating the effect of a speaker upon an audience's acceptance of the speaker, his/her message, and/or the position advocated within the message (Andersen and Clevenger, 1963; Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969; Braden, 1969; Haiman, 1949). Although much attention has been devoted to identifying speaker characteristics associated with credibility, the studies have typically focused on public speaking or public figures with whom the audience possessed limited, if any, direct contact. Very few of the studies have focused on how teachers establish, maintain, and lose credibility, or the effect of teacher credibility upon student learning (Beatty & Zahn, 1990; McCroskey, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1973).

Two of the major cognitive goals of an academic environment are the: 1) acquisition of knowledge, and 2) the ability to transfer knowledge learned in one context to new situations. Teachers serve as catalysts motivating students to achieve the cognitive and self-esteem goals associated with an academic environment. Therefore, identifying the characteristics which lead students to perceive their teachers as credible is of crucial importance. Knowledge of verbal and nonverbal teacher communication patterns capable of garnering student respect for the teacher, interest in the subject matter, and motivation to learn will be invaluable information for teacher educators and can enrich faculty development for both new and experienced teachers.

Credibility research has been heavily criticized for its movement away from the traditional conceptualization involving sources and situations of influence. Delia (1976)

and Liska (1978) argue that credibility research overemphasizes measurement and psychometric theory while underemphasizing theoretical explication of the concept of "credibility." Both researchers call for more investigation into believability from a listener's perspective and the identification of similar mental constructs for people socialized within a "common culture or social nexus" (Delia, p. 369). The present study seeks to address the concerns of Delia (1976) and Liska (1978) by using qualitative research methods to identify the verbal and nonverbal communication of teachers which they, and their students, believe lead to perceptions of teacher credibility.

An important dimension in understanding teacher credibility is that of race. As a result, race was a variable in this study. During the 1960s and 1970s much attention (Dorr, 1972; Smith & Smith, 1973) was focused on the broad societal effects of desegregation and its effects on children attending integrated schools. Many of the same concerns expressed 25 years ago (such as displacement of Black teachers and racist behavior towards them by their white peers, parents, and students) are still expressed today. Given: 1) the negative tenor of race relations within the United States (Guess, 1989; Hatchett, 1989; Walters, 1990), and 2) the continued expression of alienation by Black faculty (Cook, 1990; Lopez, 1991), it is logical to speculate that a predominantly white classroom may present particular challenges to building credibility and acceptance for the Black teacher.

The purpose of this study is to explore the conceptualization of "teacher credibility" and to examine the effect, if any, of race upon perceptions of credibility.

The method used is that of qualitative case study. The four research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1: What verbal and nonverbal communication cues do professors believe lead their students to perceive them as credible?

RQ2: When the professor's race is not the same as the majority of the students' in the class, what verbal and nonverbal communication does the professor view as leading to student perceptions of credibility?

RQ3: What verbal and nonverbal communication cues, exhibited by professors, lead students to perceive their professors as knowledgeable believable?

RQ4: What criteria are used by students to assess credibility when the professor's race is not the same as the majority of the students' in the class?

Methods

A common thread in the criticism leveled against the quantitative research about credibility is the absence of the subjects' conceptualization of the term. In other words, with the exception of Berlo, et al. (1969), researchers have typically imposed scales and traits upon their subjects. The major factors generated have been trustworthiness, expertise, dynamism, and objectivity. This study allows subject-generated conceptualizations of credibility to emerge. Qualitative case study (Philipsen, 1982) is used to bridge the theoretic gap noted in the aforementioned criticisms of factor analytic quantitative research. The object of this research is to garner theoretic power rather than statistical power.

Data Collection Procedures

Three different methods were utilized to address the four research questions: 1) non-participant observation (Spradley, 1979), 2) semi-structured interviews, and 3) open-ended questionnaires. Findings were triangulated

across these three methods (Erickson, 1986). Non-participant classroom observations occurred on a daily basis during the first week of the quarter. Observations of one class period were also made during the second, third, fifth, and seventh weeks of the quarter. Such observations served to: 1) generate questions for the student and professor participants, 2) validate between what professors (and students) said they did in class versus what communication actually occurred, and 3) provide the researcher with firsthand knowledge of the professor's communicative behavior. Data collection occurred at several different points during the 10 week quarter and, as a result, was designed to track changes in perceptions which could have occurred over time.

Semi-structured professor interviews (Ginsburg, Jacobs, & Lopez, in press) occurred twice prior to the onset of the quarter and three times during the quarter. Each interview was guided by a set of specific questions yet the interview format was left open to probing as well as the exploration of unexpected topics which emerged.

Semi-structured student interviews occurred two weeks after the distribution of an open-ended survey during classtime (refer to Appendix 1). Student interviews assessing the credibility of their professors were critical because students were the target audience for the professors' efforts. Credibility is perceptual and is in the mind of the student who functions as a listener in the classroom. On the third week of the quarter a "Professor Credibility Survey" (refer to Appendix 1) was disseminated in both classes. In the case of Professor (R), 84 surveys were completed and of these 20 contained identifying information to allow contact for interviews. 219 completed

surveys were returned in Professor (E's) class. Of the 219, 53 contained identifying information to allow contact for interviews.

From the convenience sample of willing volunteers, ten students were selected for interviews; however, one student (white female) did not attend the scheduled interview and was unwilling to reschedule. The nine participants can be described as follows: two Black males, two white males, one Pacific Islander male, one American Indian female, one Black female, and two white females. Four of these students are included in this initial analysis.

Student Participants

Four 40 minute interviews were conducted with two white and two Black male students enrolled in one of the two courses being observed. Steve is a Black male who is majoring in Sociology and will earn his B.A. degree in June 1992. Allan is a white male completing his freshman year at the university. Allan's major is undecided at this point in his academic career. Bill is an older (late twenties/early thirties) white male student who is a junior majoring in psychology. Bill has attended two post-secondary institutions and served in the military prior to attending his current academic institution. His education has recently been interrupted by a military call to serve during Desert Storm in the Middle East. Mark is a Black male, with almost enough credits for senior class status. Allan and Steve are enrolled in Professor R's three hundred level course while Bill and Mark are enrolled in Professor E's 200 level course.

Professor Participants

Both professors are faculty in the same social science department on campus and indicate they enjoy teaching despite the research emphasis of this particular campus. Professor R indicates it would not be an exaggeration to say he "loves" teaching. Each professor has teaching experience which exceeds 10 years in the classroom (university level only). In addition, they have both taught the 200 and 300 level courses under observation for this study as well as other undergraduate and graduate level courses. The student enrollment in Professor R's observed course was approximately 100 while the enrollment in Professor E's course was approximately 400.

The following criteria reflect the bases for selecting the professors: 1) race, 2) gender, 3) age, 3) departmental affiliation, and 4) teaching experience. Both professors are male, of similar age, and possess comparable years of teaching experience at the collegiate level. However, they are of different races - one professor is Black (Professor R) and the other white (Professor E). The criteria hold variables fairly constant which otherwise may account for differences in perceived credibility. Keeping the participants similar reduces the likelihood of a vividness variable (Nisbett & Ross, 1980) operating for one of the participants, and not the other, in all areas with the exception of race.

Research Site

Non-participant observation occurred in two undergraduate courses at a large four year institution in the Northwest reflecting a predominantly white student enrollment. This university was selected because the

percentage of Black faculty and Black student enrollment is small - certainly, less than the percentage found in the general metropolitan population. Out of a student body of 34,269, only three percent (1,045) of the students are Black. Yet according to the 1990 federal census records, 10.1% of this metropolitan area's residents are Black.

Data Analysis

While observing Professor R and E in their respective classrooms, non-verbal communicative strategies such as proximity, eye-contact, facial expression and voice tone were noted. Notes from these in-class, non-participant observations were reviewed after each observation with an emphasis on communicative strategies reoccurring consistently from lecture to lecture. In addition, verbal strategies such as sharing personal vignettes with their students, use of classroom questions, and the types of questions asked were noted and coded (Miles and Huberman, 1985) in order to create a communicative profile. During class observation, student responses to each professor's communicative behavior were also noted. For instance, did students avail themselves of time alloted for questions? Did students participate in the "instant" class polls taken by a show of hands? The analysis of classroom communication served as one source of questions for the professor interviews and assisted in understanding particular examples provided by students during their interviews. Later in the analytic process, professor and student perceptions of the types of communicative behavior and the nature of classroom interaction were then compared with the observations.

Professor and student interviews were transcribed from audiotapes and the characteristics associated with

credibility were noted. The characteristics the four student participants associated with credibility were then compared to each other as well as those generated by the entire class in response to the "Professor Credibility Survey" form. Who (gender, ethnicity, class) perceived what (Hymes, 1972) was tallied and logged on grids in order to examine possible relationships. Relationships among the characteristics were noted and categories reflecting the major components of credibility and subcomponents were developed according to the procedure described by Spradley (1979). Interviews were also the primary source of data pertaining to the influence of race on perceptions of credibility.

Finally, student views of credibility and the effects of race were compared to the views expressed by their professors to determine the degree of similarity regarding what constitutes credibility, what these particular professors do to communicate credibility, and whether professor race influences credibility.

Results

Communicating Credibility

The most pervasive characteristic of credibility which emerges from both professor and student interviews is the perception that credibility entails being knowledgeable and believeable. How is such knowledge communicated by professors and what behavior do students see as signs of communicating knowledge?

Professor Perceptions. According to Professor R, being a credible professor is "being an authority that they can have some faith in..." Credibility is communicated by one's physical demeanor, by the capacity to challenge students, to

answer student questions and to clearly convey their knowledge to students. Such knowledge is made apparent, according to Professor E, by showing students "some substance behind what I'm saying...knowledge or research experience...or some other kind of experience communicates some sort of validity...it isn't just my opinion."

In addition, Professor R (and Professor E to a more limited degree) makes reference to the stature of his inter-departmental colleagues, campus-wide colleagues, and the institution itself. The phenomenon of mentioning one's own research, as well as that of others at the university, is explained by Professor R as follows:

> I think there is a general lack of credibility...Prophets are without fame, or whatever it is, in their own home. Ummm I think there is a tendency on the part of UW students, probably like students a lot of places, to not think where they're in school is particularly good...I think it's important for them to know <u>what</u> the people <u>where</u> they are <u>do</u>...(I'm saying) this place is hot. It's good. And by saying that it lends to my credibility. It's good and I'm here. What's that tell ya? (Personal communication, April 3, 1992)

<u>Student Perceptions</u>. All four students use knowledge as a base for indicating they perceive their professors as credible. However, the students provide a more detailed accounting of what their professors do which makes them appear credible. The students find the professor's ability to answer their questions, clear and organized presentation of the material, limited bias in the presentation of material, the presence of facts, and reference to previous research and field experience as indicators of credibility. However, the students go further than their professors by describing their credible professors as "real," "energetic,"

"forward," and "trustworthy." Thus, although students emphasize knowledge, other dimensions of credibility are also noted.

For Steve, saying a professor is credible is to say the individual is knowledgeable. The professor knows his/her facts and can provide assistance and answer questions when students need it. When completing the survey during the third week of the quarter, Steve believes Professor R is credible "because he seems to know his facts real well." However, he qualifies his response by indicating, "...from the lecture I've heard thus far." This temporal view of credibility, its ability to change, is reflected in several student responses to the credibility survey. During the interview, he elaborates and mentions not only Professor R's knowledge and ability to present facts, but his research and field experience within correctional facilities. Thus, he applies his general definition specifically to Professor R. When asked for words which are similar to or the same as the term "credible," Steve offers "valid" and indicates that it can be substituted for the term credible.

For Allan, saying a professor is credible is to say the individual has "a very good understanding of the material" and how smoothly ("graceful") they present the material to the class without "fumbling." However, Allan also associates credibility to the ability of a professor to admit his/her knowledge limitations. During the third week of class, on the survey, he indicates Professor R is credible because he projects an image of being "forward, energetic, and research-backed" while not being pretentious and still admitting his biases.

During the interview, which occurs at the fifth week of the quarter, Allan still perceives Professor R as credible. However, he wrestles with what he describes as Professor R's "amorphous" discussion approach. He describes the approach as thought-provoking as one listens while Professor R poses a rhetorical question, answers it, and proceeds to unveil his thought processes leading to the answer. He finds the technique thought-provoking and yet is anxious regarding the upcoming test as "sometimes, you know, it's hard to point a straight arrow of ahhh is there any kind of a course that we should be taking through all of this information..." As he prepares for the course's first exam, the question doesn't seem to be one of lack of organization (organization is needed for credibility, as noted earlier) but, rather one of how to conceptualize the material for testing purposes. Thus, Allan applies his credibility criteria of knowledge, admission of bias, and organization to Professor R and finds him credible. Other terms similar to or the same as "credible" include the words real, genuine, and insightful.

For Bill, saying a professor is credible is to say the person has subject matter knowledge and does not have "an axe to grind" which allows him/her to present material in a fair manner. At the third week of the quarter, Professor E is seen as credible because he is competent, confident, and doesn't seem to have an axe to grind. At the seventh week of the quarter, Bill adjusts his response to the survey question regarding Professor E's credibility by noting he does appear to have an axe to grind as evidenced by a perspective which appears pro-sociology and anti-other disciplines. He is able to note particular class periods where he feels an anti-psychology stance is taken by

Professor E (e.g., the discussion following the film Medicine and Madness). Bill indicates "[I] was probably seeing the same thing [during the third week] but I hadn't seen enough of it yet."

Despite the gradually acquired image of having an axe to grind, Bill does not dispute Professor E's "command of the subject matter" and, thus, still indicates he is credible. The implication here is that Professor E is not as credible as he could be. Other terms for "credible" are trustworthy, competent, and unbiased.

For Mark, to say a professor is credible is to say s/he is well-educated and possesses the knowledge which should result from a strong educational background. Such knowledge leads to credibility. Mark explicitly introduces the concept of amounts of credibility to which Bill alluded. For instance, he describes Professor E as "eighty percent competent and credible." Mark says Professor E "...tries to make it like there's no difference...tries to be fair... [should] not hide the truth and [should] tell it like it is...rather than trying to cover up so his lectures sound smooth." Like Bill, Mark is able to provide specific examples of Professor E's communicative behavior which detracts from his credibility.

In Mark's case, maximum credibility is gained from possessing subject matter knowledge plus a willingness to openly deal with controversial topics in order to enlighten students. Mark believes Professor E prefers to think students in the class are not ignorant and do not adhere to stereotypical views of others found in the general public. As a result, he believes Professor E misses an opportunity

to inform and enlighten students. For instance, addressing why the text indicates most crimes are committed by Blacks. He also expresses a temporal dimension of his evaluation of Professor E's credibility by indicating he's waiting to see how Professor E handles the discussion of rape and deviance. Mark indicates he is waiting to see if Professor E brings out the racial issues and addresses them head-on or dodges them. Knowledgeable and competent are noted as other terms similar to or synonymous with the word "credible."

A Communication Perspective. Credibility as knowledge of one's subject is not enough for a classroom professor. Student attention must be captured and maintained in order to communicate one's knowledge.

RQ1: What verbal and nonverbal communication cues do professors believe lead their students to perceive them as credible?

RQ3: What verbal and nonverbal communication cues, exhibited by professors, lead students to perceive their professors as knowledgeable and believable?

Professor R would say students must be "engaged" while Professor E would say they must be "hooked." Professor R says he must be credible "for the larger things I want to do in class" such as challenge the unfounded, stereotypical thinking of students about Blacks. This perspective is also mirrored by Bill who says knowledge is not what distinguishes a good professor from a poor one. In a university setting, both types of professors will possess knowledge and, therefore, have credibility. However, the amount of credibility and the overall effect (e.g., learning) will be influenced by strong communication skills which promote interesting and challenging teaching sessions and clearly stated student expectations.

One challenge for these professors becomes how to motivate students to actively share their own knowledge while also attending to the knowledge and experience of Professor R and Professor E. These professors work hard at teacher immediacy behaviors. They use humor, actively engage students by asking questions (even in a class of 400), conducting instant (show of hands) class polls, and providing personal vignettes. Professors R and E gesture, use accentuated facial expressions, vocal variety and try to create an informal "conversational" atmosphere despite the large class size. For Professor R, the informal tone is accentuated occasionally with linguistic "markers" (e.g., - "bruthas") purposely constructed to communicate cultural identity (Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b; Hymes, 1974) and linkage with students of color in the classroom.

Summary

The ability to be seen as knowledgeable and believeable is a common theme among these students and professors. However, the four students provide a more in-depth glimpse at other components of credibility for a professor - good teaching techniques, personality, trust. When placed within the context of survey responses from 303 students in both classes, five major components of credibility emerge: knowledge, respect, personality, teaching techniques, and morals.

It is interesting to note the temporal nature of credibility as evidenced by statements offered by students and professors alike. Statements such as "most of the time," "from the lecture I've heard thus far," "...there hadn't been enough class sessions yet," and "I'm just waiting...then I'll know." In addition, two of the

students, Bill and Mark, provide insight into credibility conceived as a range of knowledge and competence combined. Thus, credibility is not present or absent but, rather present or absent to a certain degree. The amount of credibility becomes a function of a professor's competence at not being overly-biased towards one perspective and/or willingness to move beyond "mellow topics" and to open highly controversial societal viewpoints (e.g., race-related stereotypes) up to close inspection.

Race and Credibility

Professor Perceptions

Professor R. Professor R is a Black male teaching courses at a four year institution with a predominantly white enrollment. For Professor R, teaching courses where the majority of his students are of a different race than his own is the norm. Thus, the following research question is applicable to Professor R.

> RQ2: When the professor's race is not the same as the majority of the students' in the class, what verbal and nonverbal communication does the professor view as leading to student perceptions of credibility?

During our second interview, Professor R was asked, "Do you ever worry about what your students think of you?" Professor R indicated he is always concerned about what his students think of him, however, his concerns differ depending upon whether the students are Black or white. With Black students, Professor R is concerned that he creates a comfortable environment. He occasionally notes his lectures contain linguistic markers ("bruthas") to send metamessages of shared identity to minority students in the class. Professor R indicates he is aware, that in many of their classes, Black students do not have anyone who is

concerned about their comfort level while attending a predominantly white institution. Professor R says, "I, like a lot of Black faculty, probably came to this with the notion of a social obligation, and responsibility, and desire to sort of reach out to Black students."

In addition, he is concerned with how Black students view him as a person. Recently he received information from a third party regarding one Black student's perception of him as an Uncle Tom. Professor R's response is:

> ...it really hurt...I've spend a lot of time trying to figure out what it is that sort of conveys that...My guess is that I'm not street enough...It's hard to go to graduate school and to get a Ph.D. and do all the things one does to be in this field and come out soundin' like the bruthas in the street...For me to do that I would have to be really affected and false. (Personal communication, March 20, 1992)

After considerable reflection, Professor R believes this student may have objected to the fact that he does not give anything to anyone. All students must earn their grades and must meet his standards as his "prime responsibility" is to teach students everything he knows about the subject matter pertaining to the course and to instruct them how to begin thinking from his disciplinary perspective.

In regard to white students and RQ2, Professor R worries less about what they think of him as person. Professor R cares about gaining the respect of the white students rather than what they think of him as a person. He notes that respect is necessary for the class "to work [succeed]." Thus, establishing credibility and gaining the respect of students allows the class to function and allows Professor R to accomplish larger tasks such as challenging race-related stereotypes adhered to by students enrolled in the class. One means of challenging students to confront their biases

is to keep them off-guard by not allowing himself and his beliefs and personal biases to be easily categorized. In addition, he expects and encourages his positions to be challenged by students; however, the challenge must be based on knowledge and not simply opinion.

Professor R believes:

> ...the value of a diverse faculty is certainly important for minority students but it's...more important for ahhh the white students...Suddenly they have to think about not the informational differences ummm but the point of view differences and how to reconcile them. (Personal communication March 20, 1992)

Professor E. Unlike his colleague, Professor E's race is the same as the majority of the students enrolled in his courses. During the second interview I asked Professor E, "Are you ever concerned about what your students think of you?" He responded by indicating, "You're always concerned. I mean you want them to like the class and, hopefully, learn something. But on the other hand, ahhh I think maybe unlike some professors, and I think it's probably more so true of newer or younger professors, I I won't compromise my standards just to make the students happy." Professor E describes his educational institution as a "major, major university" and indicates students should be serious about their education. He perceives them as being capable of reading, thinking, being responsible, and disciplined. Professor E further notes he believes in the law of thirds - one third will love you, one third will hate you, and one third will be somewhere in between. Unlike Professor R, this question does not prompt responses related to Professor E's social identity and those of his students.

During the third interview, this topic was reintroduced

with a question asking whether Professor E works to create a particular classroom image. Professor E indicated he does not consciously try to create an image, however, after years of teaching "there's probably more of me revealed now...more of my personality."

When asked whether he is influenced by the "mix" of the class, Professor E indicates he is aware of "hot buttons" but cannot be overly concerned about offending particular groups. Professor E believes the very nature of the subject matter he teaches lends itself to very likely offending some individuals or groups within the class. In response to questions probing the influence of race on his classroom behavior, Professor E said:

> ...I never really think about that...in the same way that I wouldn't think about how I'd do that to get the males and females...18 year olds versus the ahhh 45 year old student...I never really uhhh think about it in those terms. Ummm, yeah, I really...I just try to get everybody hooked. (Personal communication, April 3, 1992)

Professor E goes on to describe himself as being "racially sophisticated" and continually trying to put himself in the other person's shoes. In response to questions regarding his image in the eyes of minority students, Professor E says he hopes that what matters is what he says and does in class rather than how he looks.

In the fourth interview, Professor E indicates "racially pragmatic" may be a better term to describe him and his approach to interactions with others. To be racially pragmatic, which he believes is true of Professor R as well, is to recognize racism as a real issue and yet not let it interfere with business and personal relationships.

Student Perceptions

The fourth research question calls for student-generated

criteria for assessing credibility when the professor's race differs from that of the majority of the students enrolled in the course. Specifically, this research question asks:

> RQ4: What criteria are used by students to assess credibility when the professor's race is not the same as the majority of the students' in the class?

Again, the nature of the institutional enrollment patterns focuses this question on Professor R and his students. The following sections chronicle views of all four students regarding race and teacher credibility; however, the responses of Steve and Allan are of particular interest in answering RQ4.

Steve. Professor R is more than credible or valid in Steve's eyes - Professor R is "a well-educated Black man." When asked if different criteria are used to judge his white vs. his Black professors, he answers affirmatively. Steve indicates he has enrolled in two courses at the University with Black professors. The fact that Professor R is Black is important to Steve. He describes Professor R as a "role model" and refers to him as "one of our leaders on campus...for the Blacks."

Steve expects knowledge from both, however, believes that his Black professors deserve more respect because they experience a "tougher" time earning their position and must "work twice as hard." (This is a belief expressed by other student interviewees who are also people of color.) Thus, Steve notes the pride he possesses in his Black professors and his belief they are "a little bit more credible." In addition, Steve notes his belief that even though he does not have a personal relationship with Professor R, if he was experiencing an academic or personal problem he would be

comfortable seeking help from Professor R and discussing either.

Allan. Throughout high school Allan has been exposed to white teachers, mostly male in gender. When applying to universities one of his inquiries involved the percentage of, not student, but faculty minorities. When asked why Professor R's race is not mentioned in his survey responses, Allan notes he has enrolled in a number of ethnic studies courses, during his first year at the university, which are typically taught by people of color; thus, he implies having a professor of color is not unusual in his case. He notes a desire to gain from the personal insights of individuals who have led lives different from his own. He indicates during high school he began to realize "there are a whole lot of people out there I don't even know anything about."

When asked whether the race (Black or white) of a professor changes the criteria he uses to determine credibility, Allan responds by saying:

> Ummm. Ummm. Gosh, it would probably be false of me to say that I didn't. But at the same time...I don't think that I really do a whole lot either. Ummm. I mean, I don't care who it is, if if they don't, you know, if they don't see me as equal in ahhh in being able to...express myself...I'm not gonna enjoy the class." (Personal communication, April 27, 1992)

As the interview progresses, he goes on to note he tries to "embrace differences" and yet recognizes, given his homogeneous upbringing, the physical appearance of his professors does have an impact. At this point, Allan is unable to clearly delineate whether the impact is a bias in favor of his professors of color or a bias in favor of those professors of the same race.

Bill. During his post-secondary education, Bill has been enrolled in courses with two Black professors, one who taught English at the community college level and another who taught racquetball at a four-year institution other than his current university of attendance. In response to my inquiry regarding the absence of Professor E's race from any of the survey responses, Bill answers:

> ...It's absent because it's not something I really take into consideration. (voice lowers) I don't think it's a factor. Sex or race. Ummm...I I don't think I would...if he was a minority and I thought he was a bad professor I don't think I would I would associate the two together. Just like if he was minority and I thought he was a good professor...(Personal communication, May 15, 1992)

Accordingly, Bill indicates he uses the same standards for Black and white professors - the presence of knowledge and the absence of "an axe to grind."

Bill, like Mark, introduces the notion of credibility and class topics under discussion. Bill notes that race and gender are not factors in courses such as mathematics. However, in courses such as deviance and psychology, which entail "race discussions," a professor can present his/her point of view, another's point of view, or the (long e sound) point of view. Which perspective is selected by a professor provides evidence of whether the person has "an axe to grind," and, thereby, influences his/her degree of credibility.

Mark. Mark is quick to note that physically he sees Professor E's color but not mentally. He states he does not see a white professor and think, "Oh, yeah. He knows more." He clarifies his point by indicating he listens carefully to what any teacher has to say and is constantly "judging" his teachers as well as noting other students' reactions. Mark

notes because of his evaluative nature neither a white nor a Black professor has an automatic advantage, however, feels more comfortable in the presence of Black professors. He describes his Black professsors as not showing "any favorites whatsoever" and notes it is clear one must work to earn his/her grades. As with Steve, a theme of pride emerges from the conversation.

In-Class Professor Credibility Survey. On the fourth, and last, survey item the race of Professor R was mentioned in two cases by volunteer student participants and in fives cases by non-volunteer student participants. One white male volunteer indicates finding out his professor is Black is a pleasant surprise after expecting an overweight white man with a red face. One Black male volunteer, Steve, notes Professor R is a "well-educated Black man." Among the non-volunteers, one Black female identifies her response to Professor R as "culture-shock" while noting he "sounds Anglo." One white male notes that a Black professor teaching the course is unexpected but does not comment further. Of the three white females who identify Professor R's race, one states it is noted but irrelevant, a second states Professor R is her first Black teacher (she is a senior), and the third states she has heard Professor R hates whites and blames them for the condition of Blacks. The same female further states that she believes Professor R is biased.

There are no references to Professor E's race on any of the four survey items from any of the students. However, an interesting pattern emerges which suggests a gender/race interaction. On the fourth question on the Professor Credibility Survey (What was your first impression of Professor E on the very first day of class? Why?) it is more typical for white females to describe Professor E as "arrogant" and "cocky" than for white males. The

description of arrogance also emerges occasionally among Black, Hispanic, and Asian males. However, only one white male completing the fourth survey item describes Professor E as a "pretty uptight guy." Typical white male student responses to the fourth survey items are: "cool guy," "He's a Gonzo fan," "great teacher," "Cool. He's down to earth," "very interesting guy," "stud...acted groovy...his silver hair makes him appear wise."

Given the similarity in gender (male) and race (white) between these student respondents and Professor E, there appears to be a social identification. One possible interpretation of these data is that these white males, unlike their white female and minority male counterparts, identify with and take pride in Professor E. In addition, the Asian female students, much larger in number than other minority females enrolled in the course, appear as another group which positively views Professor E.

Summary

In response to RQ4 (the student criteria used to assess credibility when a professor's race differs from that of the majority of the class), both Steve and Allan view Professor R as credible due to his subject-matter knowledge and research expertise. They are also both aware of his Black racial identity but for different reasons. Steve finds a role model and potential confidant. Allan finds an opportunity to learn not only about subject matter but about a person of a different race - a race to which heretofore he has very limited exposure. The connections made by both students are consistent with Professor R's perception of the value of a diverse faculty on the university campus.

Professor R notes: 1) the importance of Black faculty being concerned for ("social obligation") the comfort of Black students in predominately white university surroundings, and 2) prompted white students to move beyond informational differences to address point of view differences.

Bill and Mark, students of Professor E, do not express any particular bond with or special role for Professor E other than teacher. Bill, like Professor E, is white. Bill does not reflect any particular social pride in Professor E and his accomplishments nor do his interview comments reflect any affinity or dislike for Black professors. He provides a short, direct response to my question regarding exposure to Black professors and does not elaborate regarding perceptions of the experience or the perceived credibility of the two professors noted. Bill's primary concern appears to be a balanced presentation of information regardless of who is presenting the material. He is not seeking rapport with Professor E. In addition, unlike Mark, he is not seeking open discussion of race-related, or controversial issues but a balanced presentation (more than one viewpoint presented with equal respect) of the material.

Both Black males, Steve and Mark, indicate pride in Black professors and comfort in the presence of Black professors. Yet they both note Black professors, like their white counterparts, must earn credibility by demonstrating knowledge of the subject matter as evidenced by facts, research and field experience, and moving beyond safe topics. Allan is purposely seeking exposure to new points of view resulting from life experiences different from his own. Faculty members who are people of color, rather than white, allow him to move beyond his homogeneous, middle-

class, white upbringing. For Allan, the familiarity of being surrounded by whites socially and academically has become too comfortable and undesireable.

Professor R is challenged to gain the respect and acceptance of not one, but two difference audiences - one white and the other, like himself, Black. Professor R is the product of an Anglicized educational system, a system which expects those who differ from the dominant white, male model to assimilate and adapt in order to succeed. He must confidently demonstrate his subject matter knowledge, research, and field experience in order to combat negative stereotypes and to gain the respect of his white students. Student respect and perceptions of Professor R as credible allow him to address "larger issues" related to unfounded racial beliefs.

At the same time, Professor R desires to maintain his social identity and his ties with the Black community, thus, he is bicultural in his orientation. Professor E does not feel a need to prove his whiteness when speaking to his predominately white classes. However, for Professor R, proving his Blackness is critical to the process of establishing credibility with Black audience members - whether students or professional colleagues. Professor R notes he can't do his job if he's unable to "bring them along" and indicates it is futile to debate about whose fault it is that he must have such concerns. Professor R believes it is far more productive to admit we live in a world where race is an issue.

Professor E does not reveal any particularly focused effort to recognize the needs of the minority students enrolled in his courses. In addition, a belief he must show

allegiance to his white students is not manifest in the interviews nor in his classroom communication. However, based on the total classroom survey responses, it is interesting to note the possible social identification of white male students with Professor E.

Professor E's goal is to "hook" all of his students and, implicitly, it appears he hopes his racially pragmatic view will assist him in saying and doing things in the classroom which will cause students to overlook differences racial and social identity.

Discussion

Several phenomena emerge from these case studies which merit comment: 1) the existence of group and institutional credibility, 2) the temporal nature of credibility, 3) the presence of comraderie and personal relationships among departmental faculty, 4) shared student and professor identity and the need for biculturalism on the part of Black professors, 5) the continued presence of "self" teacher concerns for Professor R, and 6) the potential of researcher race influencing the study results.

First, credibility has previously been conceived as a construct negotiated between an individual and his/her audience (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). These data provide insight into influence of group and institutional credibility on the credibility of an individual. Professors R and E mention each other, their departmental, and their campus peers in the classroom rather than relying solely upon self-reference. Such references are made to establish the credibility of the institution (so its professors will not be "prophets without fame" in their own educational environment), the specific discipline, and

oneself. Thus, reputation of a group and/or institution becomes a factor in building credibility.

Second, the temporal nature of credibility (Applbaum & Anatol, 1972; Cronkite & Liska, 1976; Liska, 1978; McCroskey, Holdridge, & Toomb, 1974; Tucker, 1971) also becomes evident in the student interviews as well as in theresponses to the Professor Credibility Survey. Although credibility may stem from sources outside of the professor, it becomes his/her task to maintain it throughout the duration of the term. In addition, credibility is conceptualized by some students in degrees rather than absolutes. In other words, when present credibility does not automatically equate to 100% credibility.

Third, it is important to note Professors R and E are well-aware that they have built reputations which precede them into the classroom. Thus, the experience of building credibility may differ significantly for new professors beginning their careers and for experienced professors without benefit of the team-building efforts which can be associated with Professors R, E, and a third professor within their department. Professors R and E note much of their subject matter discussion occurs during personal interactions rather than administrative settings. This point is especially salient for Black professors teaching at a predominantly white institution. In the absence of a comraderie and a supportive professional environment, how do Black professors build credibility within their classroom and their disciplinary departments?

Fourth, Professor R explicitly notes his social obligations to Black students enrolled at this predominantly white institution. The expectation of such concern from

Black professors (and an acknowledgement of concern by white professors) is expressed by the two Black male students chronicled in this paper. Professor R believes it necessary to address two different audiences effectively, thus, he is bicultural. Choices available to Black professors in white environments typically entail some degree of cultural sacrifice. The sacrifice can entail lesser degrees of sacrifice as evidenced by biculturalism (Edwards, 1987) or greater degrees as evidenced by racelessness (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). However, it is apparent some amount of one's social identity is compromised in order to successfully enter traditionally white professional occupations. Professor R choses to maintain his Black cultural ties with his community while recognizing he may not be "street enough" for some of his Black students. However, he recognizes the power of his language (Sprague 1991; 1992) as he attempts to build his credibility while simultaneously cultivating his cultural identity.

Fifth, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966) there are two types of socialization - primary and secondary. Primary socialization begins at birth and continues through one's childhood. Primary socialization involves learning how to behave as a member of society. Secondary socialization is a process which entails orienting an already socialized individual into new sectors of his/her environment. Staton and Hunt (1992) describe teacher socialization as a process by which individuals selectively acquire the traits (e.g., attitudes, values) of the groups to which they currently belong or seek to gain membership. Staton-Spicer and Darling (1987) analyze the process of socialization in terms of communication concerns around

self, task, and impact. According to this conceptualization of socialization, K-12 teachers and graduate teaching assistants move progressively through the concern stages depending upon their years of teaching experience. In other words, a new teacher will be more concerned about how s/he is viewed rather than how to actually present the material/lessons effectively or how to impact student learning. In the case of Professor R, self concerns are quite prevalent and he believes such concerns are natural for minority professors and, perhaps, female professors as well. Keeping in mind that the collegiate environment has only recently been integrated by minority and female faculty, it may be beneficial to pursue the research of Staton and Darling using a post-secondary population with a particular emphasis on minority and/or female professors.

Sixth, and finally, a review of my interview notes indicates a kinship between me and the students of color with the exception of one. My transcripts reflect movement towards a more casual tone and colloquialisms which indicate inclusiveness. I find that I used some of the same code-switching moves (Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b; Hymes, 1974) which can be noted in the conversation of Professor R and his students as well as his interviews with me. For me there is not a dilemma. Part of my responsibility as an interviewer is to put the students at ease. One means of accomplishing this task is to convey "fictive kinship." I had to choose between being the prim, proper,and detached interviewer (the typical Anglicized male model as noted by Oakley, 1981) or a professional cognizant of my femininity as well as my race (and that of my interviewees). When interviewing students I chose what I believed was expected of me given our similarities and/or differences as advocated by Oakley (1981). In the case of Steve, due to our joint African-American heritage, I interpreted the use of phrases such as "we need" and "our leaders on campuses" as attempts

to establish a kinship relationship. The key, for me, was to be genuine while simultaneously maintaining professionalism. This "rule of thumb" was also held true in the case of Professor R.

Conclusion

Little communication research has used a qualitative research methodology to thoroughly explicate the credibility construct despite consistent criticisms leveled against the historically quantitative approach. With the exception of the race versus belief controversy (Rokeach, 1960; Triandis & Davis, 1965; Triandis, Loh, & Levin, 1966), even less research has acknowledged the influence of race on a listener's evaluation of a speaker.

As a Black faculty member, teaching in a predominantly white classroom, Professor R perceived particular challenges to building credibility which were non-existent (or existent to a lesser degree) for his white colleague, Professor E. Yet both Professors R and E are expected to motivate and assist their students in attaining the cognitive and self-esteem goals associated with a collegiate academic environment.

According to Geertz (1973), a "text" approach to research provides substantive rather than reductive data. Both Geertz and Bruner (1985) maintain "texts" are context-sensitive and open to multiple interpretation. The purpose of this study is to provide one "text" for interpreting the process of credibility-building in the classroom with the hope that additional "texts" will follow. Given: 1) the conceptual gap left by the rapid development and use of quantitative methods in lieu of theory, 2) the negative tenor of race relations in the U.S., 3) the expression of the same race-related concerns by Black teachers after several decades of integration, and 4) the critical role of the teacher/professor in the learning process; hopefully, additional research and "texts" will follow.

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Professor Credibility Survey

Section A _____

Gender (*circle one*) **Male** **Female**

Major: _____

Year in School (*circle one*) **Freshman** **Sophomore** **Junior** **Senior** **Other**

Race/Ethnicity (*circle one*) **Black/African American** **Pacific Islander** **Hispanic American**

White/Anglo American **American Indian** **Asian American**

International Student (specify country) _____

If you are willing to participate in a one hour interview with me regarding your impressions of this class and Professor . please complete BOTH Sections B and C.

Your name will NOT be used in my final report and Dr. will NOT know you spoke with me.

If you are NOT interested in the one hour interview, leave Section B blank and complete Section C.

Section B _____

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Convenient Times to Call _____

Section C _____

Is Professor credible? Please discuss why or why not.

Please complete the reverse side.

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Section C (continued) _____

What does it mean to say a professor is credible?

What other words are the same as or similar to "credible"?

What was your first impression of Professor on the very first day of class? Why?

Thank you for your participation.

April 1992